

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Walla Walla-Tucannon River No. 1 Bridge Replacement and Access Road Improvements

PP&A No.: 6623

Project Manager: Ariel Kramer -TELF-TPP-3

Location: Columbia County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3-Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace a bridge, construct a new bridge and improve access roads along the Walla Walla-Tucannon River No. 1 transmission line. BPA owns and operates this transmission line, located on private land near Dayton, Columbia County, Washington. To provide safe and reliable access to transmission structures, BPA maintains a network of access roads in the area. One of these access roads crosses West Patit Creek, a stream containing Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish species. This crossing is an existing bridge, that is proposed to be removed and replaced with a 16-foot-wide by 55-foot-long prefabricated bridge to improve safety and reliability. The second bridge location is located south of the existing bridge. The location is a seasonal stream that is currently crossed by a private road via an unimproved ford. BPA proposes to replace the ford with a 16-foot-wide by 75-foot-long prefabricated bridge. Both bridges would span the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM).

In addition to the bridge work, BPA proposes to improve access roads and landings between spans 41/1 and 41/6 of the transmission line. The access roadwork includes approximately 1.7 miles of improvements which consists of light blading and addition of rock. BPA would also construct approximately two new graded and rocked landings and improve five landings around transmission line structures, with dimensions ranging from 20 feet by 40 feet to 60 feet by 30 feet. Landings allow for safe access to the transmission line for maintenance equipment. Surface water control features would also be installed to properly channel run-off and stormwater off the road surface into established natural drainages. BPA would install approximately two drain dips to facilitate stormwater drainage. Equipment generally used for this work includes an excavator, graders, gravel trucks, and light duty trucks. The work would be performed in 2026.

Permanent work areas include the new bridge location, the new landing sites, and new drain dips. Temporary work areas include two laydown areas adjacent to the bridge sites, and existing landings and access roads.

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also

authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C. § 838i(b)(3)).

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996; 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.¹

Is Samantha Rinker
Samantha Rinker
Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey C. Grange Date: December 16, 2025
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

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Project Site Description

The proposed action is in the Columbia Plateau ecoregion of southeastern Washington. This ecoregion is surrounded by the Cascade Mountains to the west, the Rocky Mountains to the east, the Okanogan Highlands to the north and the Blue Mountains to the south. The Columbia Plateau is an arid shrub-grassland, with a continental climate that has marine influence. Most of the precipitation occurs during the winter, and the summers are dry and hot.

The proposed action would occur within BPA right-of-way (ROWs) and access roads for the Walla Walla-Tucannon River No. 1 transmission line, on private land. Adjacent land uses include rural residences, agriculture, and private forest land. The area's topography is hilly, with a mix of upland rangeland, comprised of perennial grasses, cheatgrass, and native shrubs, and forests of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The riparian corridor contains non-native grasses and native shrubs, like cottonwood, willow, and black hawthorn.

The proposed project area contains two distinct work areas. The northern work area is focused on a proposed replacement of an aging bridge over West Patit Creek. The channel of West Patit creek is confined from lateral migration by natural entrenchment as well as historic rock and riprap lining in areas. Riparian habitats host a weedy mix of species tolerant to periodic flood disturbance and of cobbly, sharp-draining soils. The southern work area contains an existing unimproved ford through an unnamed perennial tributary to West Patit Creek. The tributary joins West Patit Creek just west of the proposed work area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA evaluated the proposed project and developed an Area of Potential Effects (APE). On April 25, 2025, BPA initiated consultation with the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). The Spokane Tribe of Indians responded on April 28, 2025, and deferred to the Nez Perce Tribe. On July 17, 2025, BPA made a determination that the project would have no adverse effect to historic or cultural resources. WA DAHP concurrence on the determination was received on July 17, 2025. No other comments were received.

In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: Road cuts and ground disturbance would be relatively minimal, as no new road footprint is planned. Disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with hydromulch and native seed or weed free straw and native seed. As necessary, and particularly near sensitive areas, erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented, such as straw mulch, wattles, and silt fence. Restoration efforts would be inspected prior to contractor de-mobilization and monitored to ensure final stabilization goals are met.

Notes:

- BPA's access road contractor would develop and implement an erosion control plan to minimize erosion and sedimentation on the project.

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access road improvements, as well as landings and temporary staging areas would disturb the vegetation that is immediately adjacent to or growing within the existing road footprint. No new road footprint is planned; therefore, impacts to vegetation would be limited. Those un-rocked, disturbed areas would be seeded and monitored to ensure revegetation.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list on September 29, 2025, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to analyze the proposed project's impacts to plant species protected under the ESA. No ESA-listed plant species are present in the project area; therefore, the project would have "No Effect" on ESA-listed species.

4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access road and bridge construction activity would temporarily disturb local wildlife, including mammals and birds, due to human presence and noise from heavy equipment. However, disturbance would be temporary, during daylight hours, and limited to the immediate access road area. Surrounding woodlands provide ample habitat and cover for any wildlife disturbed by the project's activities.

In accordance with the ESA, BPA obtained an official species list on September 29, 2025, from the USFWS to analyze the proposed project's impacts to wildlife species protected under the ESA. Yellow-billed cuckoo, monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee were listed in the project area. BPA determined that the project would have "No effect" on yellow-billed cuckoo, monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee.

5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: West Patit Creek and one of its seasonal tributaries are present in the project area. A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fish passage report from 2008 lists resident and migratory salmonid use of West Patit Creek, including Middle Columbia River steelhead. BPA is proposing to replace an existing treated wood bridge on the access road that crosses West Patit Creek with a prefabricated bridge with a new span for improved safety and reliability. BPA is also proposing to replace a ford over the seasonal tributary of

West Patit Creek with a prefabricated bridge to allow safe access during periods of higher flow. All bridge work has been designed to avoid in-water work and, more generally, all work is above the OHWM.

Any effects to ESA-listed anadromous salmonids are covered by BPA's programmatic biological opinion with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (SLOPES PBO; WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016). It was determined that, by complying with the project design criteria listed within the SLOPES PBO, potential effects to ESA-listed anadromous salmonids would be consistent with those evaluated and addressed in the SLOPES PBO.

Bull trout were on the USFWS's official species list for the area. Based on the ESA review conducted, bull trout are not documented in any waterways within the project area. Therefore, BPA made a determination of "No effect" for bull trout.

To comply with the Clean Water Act, BPA conducted a wetland and waterway survey of the proposed bridge replacement location and the proposed new bridge location, performed by a professional wetland scientist. A wetland and waterway delineation report was then developed. Under Section 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act, a Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA) will be submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology).

Notes: Work cannot proceed until the JARPA process is complete and any required Clean Water Act permits are issued.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A wetland and waterway survey was conducted and a determination was made that there are no wetlands in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation would not occur at a depth that would intersect or impact groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change existing land use, nor is the project within a specially-designated area. Due to access road work, there would be a temporary impact on the landowner's ability to access portions of their property. This impact would be temporary, short in duration, and has been clearly communicated to the landowner during the project planning phase. The road and bridge improvements ultimately benefit both the landowner and BPA in the long-term by providing safe and reliable access.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The current visual profile of the project area consists of private property, transmission line corridor and access roads, which would not be significantly altered by the proposed project. The bridge replacement and new bridge would be visually consistent with the existing bridge and visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, local impacts to air quality would occur due to construction activity and vehicular traffic, however impacts would be temporary and insignificant. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would generate noise. However, impacts would be local and relatively minor. All project activity would occur during daylight hours, and there would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A site-specific safety plan would be developed by the contractor and implemented during construction. Overall, the project would improve the safety and reliability of the transmission system, and provide safer access to transmission structures during inspection, maintenance, and emergency response.

Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.

Explanation: N/A

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: N/A

Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

Explanation: N/A

Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.

Explanation: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA Realty is in coordination with the private landowner

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ Samantha Rinker

Samantha Rinker

Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Date: December 16, 2025